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ABSTRACT

These materials consist of sample lesson plans for teaching about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, in both U.S. and world history classes. The lesson plans challenge students to examine how current attitudes toward the Japanese may be rooted in World War II and Pearl Harbor. Selected bibliographies on Pearl Harbor, World War II, and contemporary Japan are included. (DB)

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EAST ASIAN STUDIES CENTER

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

CURRICULUM ENHANCEMENT SERIES

#1 Teaching About Pearl Harbor

1992

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

The Curriculum Enhancement Series is a set of lesson plans on aspects of East Asian culture and history. A selected bibliography and suggested readings are included with each lesson plan. We welcome your comments and ideas for future lessons in the Series.

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"Teaching About Pearl Harbor: Challenging the Next Generation"

Sample Lesson Plan for American History Classes

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The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 continues to shape American perceptions of Japan and the Japanese. In the context of a lagging U.S. economy and Japan's growing international influence, American attitudes are also shaped by the U.S. media, which often express our relations with Japan in images of conflict rather than cooperation. The use of the language of warfare for business is neither unprecedented nor unusual. In Japanese-American relations, however, such metaphoric language is often a thin cover for old misunderstandings and resentments. This lesson, with its readings, encourages students to examine these images of the Japanese in the context of American history.

Goal: This unit is designed to examine the basis of some contemporary American attitudes towards Japan and the Japanese. It combines the study of history with current affairs. It looks at history not merely as the reporting of "facts" about the past, but also at how contemporary attitudes influence the way the past is presented. The overall goal is to encourage cross-cultural understanding. Teachers can thus provide students methods to examine their own beliefs as well as those found in their textbooks and in the media.

Reading: *New York Times* (Nov. 3, 1991) article on Pearl Harbor; "The Legacy of the War" chapter from Sheila Johnson, *The Japanese through American Eyes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 17-31. Total, 20 pp.

Time required: The unit can be shortened or lengthened with supplementary materials, such as a video. Without a video, the lesson should take one class period. This lesson could be undertaken after students have completed the units on World War II and reparations, but it could also be done later, at the beginning of a unit on modern Asia.

To get students talking, you can have two lists on the board, labeled "America" and "Japan," each subdivided into "Now" and "Then." Start by asking students for some words or images that they have now of Japan and the Japanese. What movies or television programs have they seen about Pearl Harbor and/or WWII? Do they have older

relatives with stories of their experiences from that era? What are some terms we use to talk about Japan? the Japanese? Write down even the worst of epithets—they can be useful as well.

Then, from their textbook reading and Johnson's chapter, ask what Americans thought of the Japanese during the 1940's. What were some events that might have made them feel that way? Can they recall any examples from their reading?

Next, ask the same questions about the Japanese. Try to get them to put themselves in the position of a Japanese citizen today and during the war. For example, what might an older Japanese woman, who was a teenager during the bombing of Hiroshima and the Occupation, think?

Using their ideas, see if they can make connections between the two sets of lists. For example, if they see the Japanese today as "greedy" (buying up American property), they could be asked if American investment in Asia is "greedy" as well. Is that perception of Japanese desire to acquire American property seen as another example of their WWII goals? Or, if they see the Japanese as "hard-working" (as in the "salaryman" image), did that image exist also during the war? What did Americans think then?

From the Japanese perspective, why are there such mixed feelings among the different generations of Japanese about the Americans? Why is it that some Japanese feel angry or resentful towards Americans? Draw on the readings, particularly on aspects of the Occupation, the internment of Japanese-Americans, and the current tension between the US and Japan over trade relations to help them see the other viewpoints.

To conclude, ask them to think of some ways Americans and Japanese could understand each other's viewpoints better, such as meetings, student exchanges, more communication between government officials—even learning more about the other nation's history.

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Since world history textbooks must cover broad spans of time and space, they seldom discuss the cultural context of past events. They also tend to focus on political, economic, and geographic factors. As a supplement to the textbook presentation, we can look at historical and contemporary events as motivated by cultural factors so that students can learn new methods of examining their own and other cultures. Students are told "unless you know your past, you can't know your future," yet they can have difficulty seeing how things that happened before they were born affect their everyday lives. Many American attitudes towards Japan are deeply rooted in World War II—not only in the events, but also in the cultural and racial stereotypes of Japanese (and Asians in general) that grew out of that conflict. This lesson, with its readings, can stimulate students to question their received ideas about Japan and the Japanese—and about Asia and Asians.

Goal: This unit is designed to examine some of the repercussions of the "Pacific conflict" in terms of persistent American attitudes towards Asians, particularly the Japanese. (This unit could easily be expanded or changed to focus on China.) It combines the study of history with the study of racial stereotypes. The unit also encourages students to see how past feelings and stereotypes continue to influence current affairs.

Reading: John Dower, "Epilogue," in *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), pp. 293-317. Total, 21 pp.

Time required: This lesson can be undertaken after students have finished the units on World War II and reparations, but it would be equally relevant, for example, during their units on the Korean or Vietnam wars, perhaps with an added reading. The unit should take one class period.

A comparative approach for this topic is particularly useful. Since one of the main issues discussed in the reading is the ongoing problem of East/West misunderstanding, you could start by asking students about popular images of World War II in Europe. What are some of the movies they have seen? The images of the Nazis and the French? How much do they know about the Holocaust? The Marshall Plan and what it did for Europe? Try to

help them separate the "facts" they know about what happened and popular perceptions. (Not all Nazis were blond, not all French were Resistance fighters, John Wayne did not take Normandy singlehandedly, etc.). Then, from their textbook reading, what do they recall about World War II in East Asia? You may need to remind them, for example, of the Japanese invasion of Korea and China (and the preceding power struggle going on in China), the Japanese occupation of Indonesia, and the U.S. bombing of Japan. The review may be necessary precisely because the students already have a cultural framework, built by movies and books and stories, into which the war in Europe fits. The story of the war in East Asia is probably less familiar and less likely to stick in their memories.

Aside from their understanding of history, what, if any, popular images do they have about the war in East Asia? Do they have older relatives with stories of their experiences from that era? If the students themselves have few images of Asians from the period, ask them to recall some of the perceptions Dower mentions: the Japanese as "treacherous," "shifty," "primitive." What do they think of those terms and perceptions? Can they think of some reasons how these images became so popular?

Working still in the East/West context, shift to current affairs. Ask students for some images they have about the Japanese today. What is happening in US/Japan relations that makes Americans and Japanese angry with each other? What do they know about the development of Japan after the war? A brief sketch of the tensions based on trade imbalances and Japan's economic strength can give them some context. We are in economic competition and have unequal trade balances with some countries in Europe as well—why don't we feel the same way about them? Another useful example would be the problems that arose during the Gulf war: one the one hand, many people were angry that the Japanese did not send troops, that they were not "doing enough." On the other hand, there were also articles that warned against "remilitarizing Japan." Why did Japan not send troops, and what was the debate inside Japan about this problem?

Using their own words about "Japan and the Japanese today," and drawing on the Dower reading, help them make connections between the older images of the Japanese and current tensions. If you are doing this lesson after units on the Korean and Vietnam wars, you could also pursue the question of such images in these conflicts—they may have more images of Asians from the Vietnam war, given their recent presence in the media and popular culture.

Lastly, ask them to imagine what could be done to change those perceptions. Hopefully, they will see that what they are doing—talking about the problem, and learning about other cultures—is in itself one of the solutions.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR PEARL HARBOR AND RELATED TOPICS

Much of the material available for secondary school and beginning college-level courses tends to repeat a "Pearl Harbor story." Although such an approach is full of dramatic impact, it often sacrifices discussion of the event's historical contexts or later influence in the interest of telling a good (or simple) story. Below are some materials that provide information on the historical and cultural contexts of Japanese and American involvement in World War II from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. In addition, works that treat the war in terms of contemporary U.S.-Japan relations can be adapted for the classroon.

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